

Gazette 5-27-2011

County working on Fairport flooding issues

Sanitary engineer offers some advice on how residents can help

by **MARIAN MCMAHON**

PAINESVILLE - Fairport Harbor residents, like many from other communities, have been having more than their share of flooding issues this year. Since the Lake County Department of Utilities system serves the community, some residents have appealed to the Lake County Board of Commissioners to have more done to rectify the sewer issues.

The county has been working in Fairport to make improvements to the system in recent years.

One major issue of concern for any sanitary sewer system is the amount of storm water which enters the system. When there is too much inflow and infiltration (of storm water), otherwise known as I and I, the waste water treatment plants get overloaded. Not only is it much more costly to treat what is coming in because of so much storm water, the system might become so overwhelmed that untreated waste ends up in local rivers and Lake Erie.

Following the recent flooding issues, Director of Water Systems Randy Rothlisberger, Assistant County Sanitary Engineer Denis Yurkovich, Director of Waste Water Bob Shelby and Lake County Commissioner Ray Sines met with Fairport Harbor Mayor Frank Sarosy, administrator David McGuirk and village engineer Scott Wood.

"We started meeting with Fairport in about 2006 to try to figure out what was going on there and how to address some of the issues," Rothlisberger said.

He noted that no sewer system could be built to handle the very worst storms, such as the flood of July 2006 which was called a 500-year storm. Plus, when buildings are being flooded, the water enters the sanitary drains and nothing can be done to stop it.

poration was hired to review the system and provide a plan to rectify certain issues with the Fairport system, which LCDU has been following.

About 2,000 feet of sanitary sewer lines have been replaced and the Glyco Lift Station will soon be undergoing improvements. Currently, the station is being examined to determine just what needs to be fixed. The force mains use pressure to move the sewage along through the lines to a wastewater treatment plant. Like any other machinery, parts can wear down and cause problems.

While the water tables have been higher and there has been so much rain, the county has been televising the lines to discover where the storm water is entering the system.

Inflow is rain water which enters through a direct connection to the sanitary system, such as from a downspout connected to the sanitary line.

Infiltration is the rain water which enters through cracks in manhole covers or the "chimneys" leading from ground level to the sanitary sewers, or from leaks in connections or cracks in sewer lines.

A good part of the problem of I and I is originating on private properties, which the county cannot correct with public funds.

Asked about the cost of processing storm water which enters the system, Rothlisberger said they estimated one particular event cost the system an additional \$30,000 in Fairport, over and above the normal processing costs. Those additional costs are passed along to consumers since the system is sustained through customer billing.

While the county is doing what it can, residents must also try to decrease the amount of storm water entering the sanitary sewer system from their properties. Anything they do will help cut back on flooding issues and the additional costs arising from treating storm water.

The alternative to reducing storm water going into the sanitary system will be for the county to build more in-

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frastructure to handle the increased flows and increases in costs to customers.

Electric costs were about doubled during February, March and April due to the large amounts of storm water entering the sanitary system. The Mentor treatment plant, in dry weather, processes about 12 million gallons per day; but recently has been about 20 million gallons per day with the additional storm water coming in.

Rothlisberger said the county is working on trying to educate customers on what they can do to help.

First, they should check to make sure their sump pumps are connected to the storm sewer system - not the interior sanitary pipe - or they empty at least five feet away from the foundation.

Downspouts, if they are in the ground, might be con-

nected to the sanitary sewer or to the footer drains, which might also be connected to the sanitary line. The best thing to do is to have them drain onto a splash block which is directed away from the foundation.

If residents are unsure of where their sump pumps and downspouts are draining, the county can have someone do a dye test to see if they are connected properly.

Another way customers can help to keep costs down is by taking care about what they put into the system. Things like baby wipes and women's feminine hygiene products, should not be flushed down the toilet because they can get caught in the lift stations. Even products that state they are flushable should not go down the toilet.

Cooking oils and fats also should not be put down the drain because they can stick to the sides of the sewer lines and cause blockages until the lines are cleaned out.

Another issue is how homeowners can pay for re-

pairs to leaking or broken lines that run from their houses to the main sanitary sewer lines. Since the repair or replacement can cost \$3,000 to \$4,000; that can be a problem for some homeowners. (A plumber can televise the line to see if there are problems for about \$200 to \$300.)

"There's some funding for low- to moderate-incomes with CDBG (Community Development Block Grant funds) to do some of these improvements," Rothlisberger said. "That's something that we are working on right now in our department; what help we can provide and what help the law allows us to provide."

LCDU is seeking other ways to help homeowners who need to make costly repairs, and it might be possible to spread out the costs on the tax bill. However, since LCDU basically has enough staff to run the system, but not go out and make repairs, a plan would need to be worked out since private contractors would likely need to do the work.